OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship

Purpose:--"*To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man.*"

VOL. 3 NOVEMBER, 1948 No. 2

Religious Education Number

Prayer

Come to us through the silence, in the night, meet us in the desert, or, if we shun the lonely way, meet us in the crowd, reveal Thyself in the intercourse of life, speak above the tumult in thunder to our souls, Amen.

Joint Editorial:

The chief stimulus for the beginning of this Fellowship was the desertion by certain so-called "religious humanists" within the American Unitarian Association of a personalistic view of Reality. Unitarianism is by its very name founded on the doctrine of the unipersonality of God. The "religious humanists" would turn it into a cult of the true and beautiful and good. Of truth and beauty and goodness we cannot have too much, but those absolute values are no substitute for communication with a personality who realizes them.

The nub of the matter is, Can religion be depersonalized and still be religion? In the long tradition of Judaism and Christianity reality has always been a Thou or Thee or Thy. The same is true of all the historical religions of civilized man. Granted there have been sages of India who talked of the Absolute as an It or That. But those same sages, to be consistent, had to depersonalize man. They made man's highest attainment a loss of his distinctively personal characteristics. At such cost is the neutralizing of Deity purchased. But in all the world's living religions today, the Deity is personalized.

This is so true that it is doubtful whether there can be such a thing as religion at all without a personalizing of Reality. For after all we are persons, each with his own will, and the impact of ultimate values upon us is the impact of a transcendent Will. This personal equation is the very condition of our manhood. Judged by this standard "religious humanism" is neither **religious** nor **HUMAN.**

If this be true, then we ought to face the immediate practical fact that our denominational publishing activities are making it more and more difficult for us to teach our own children our faith in God. If we ask for curriculum materials, we are given an amorphous mass of dubious material which scrupulously avoids going beyond that which any humanist could affirm. Our children, as well as adults, are confused by the intermingled humanist service elements in the midst of our hymn books. Sensitive children quickly get the strong feeling that "God" is a word to argue about—not a living reality in whom we find security and strength. And the opportunity of the child to know the experience of worshipping with a group of fellow worshippers is destroyed.

"Yes, We Ought to Indoctrinate"

ALEXANDER WINSTON
(Minister, First Parish, Portland, Maine)

All religious teaching is indoctrination. We should frankly face that fact. We at-

tempt to implant into the minds of children the ideals, beliefs, hopes and convictions which we have tested in the fire of our own lives. The so-called "progressive" type of religious instruction indoctrinates the child with a few rudimentary ideas, such as: it is good to be good, calves are born from cows, we shall all die (as grandmother did), and Jesus was an interesting boy. Beyond these inalienable truths "progressive" religious education shrinks from going, and therefore ends up by indoctrinating the child with **the idea that beyond these nothing is essential to religious belief.** The time has come (and is long past for many of us) when we could have any traffic with so hollow, so delicately pagan a viewpoint. If from the earliest years our religious instruction is God-centered, Christ-centered, church-centered, we shall be preparing men and women strong enough for this strenuous world. In the First Church of Christ in Portland (The First Parish), our curriculum seeks to bring the child to believe, fervently, these things: (1) God is a Living Spirit with whom we can have personal relationships (2) Jesus Christ is the crucial disclosure of God (3) human nature is a mixture of good and evil impulses (4) the church and Christianity are vital to our world and to ourselves (5) immortality. We think that any less than this is insufficient preparation for life. We frankly indoctrinate our children with what we hold to be the truth.

What Our Young People Need

CLAYTON BROOKS HALE
(Minister, Channing Unitarian Church, Rockland, Mass.)

The first test of any church is the care of its young. A church is degenerate and done for, when it lives only for the present. If you desire to test your own churchmanship and your own Christianity, I know of no more decisive way than this: **look around at the young and ask yourselves how much you really care for their future.** Certainly no one can call himself a Christian unless he is sacrificially concerned for the generations which follow him.

Young people are bewildered and confused by the action of adults in these uncertain times. They are ethically confused, as they see might overriding right and principles giving way to expediency. They are aesthetically confused, having acquired many tastes from our lush American culture but not much disciplined discrimination. They are religiously confused, asking, "If there be a God, where is He?" The young are looking for leaders. They are weary of our waywardness. They are tired of the spirit voiced in the rollicking song: "We don't know where we're going but we're on the way." Such a spirit may be all right for a picnic, but many of our young people are beginning to suspect that **life is not a picnic.**

Thus confused, too many young people can easily become the prey of any Pied Piper of atheism or any dictator or demagogue. Yet where can they find in our so-called Christian Democracy those who will lead them out of the wilderness?

Men have traditionally looked to the school for such guidance and as a result have adhered to the idea that we should teach youth to think rather than **what to think.** But may not this concept be carried too far? To teach a boy to think but to give him no guidance in what to think and then to turn him loose in the maze of courses offered by our schools and the variety of voices in our world today is about as risky as to teach a boy how to eat but to give him no guidance in what to eat and then to turn him loose in a well stocked delicatessen. **He is likely to die of indigestion before he learns a balanced diet.**

If we are really concerned about young people, we must begin now not only to teach them how to think but to give them guidance in what to think. Through our schools we may give them a better means of making a living; but through our churches we must help them find meanings for **making a better life.** We must help them face and answer such questions as these: What is this whirling earth?—a gigantic fly-wheel on which we are caught like helpless insects?—or is it a vale of soul-making in which we, the sons of God, are working out some high destiny? What are the purposes worth living and worth dying for? Why sacrifice for others? Why be good? Why live?

May I be more personal? . . . May I ask whether the young people who watch you live find life growing more meaning-

ful? Do those who live with you catch a more vital sense of God's guidance? Do you inspire the young with a high sense of purpose? If so, you should have no great difficulty in developing a strong youth program in your church. **The churches which will be strongest tomorrow will be those with the firmest faith in their ideals and deepest springs of moral and spiritual power.**

A Review
OF
"WHAT IS HAPPENING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION"

by Raymond B. Johnson

(Beacon Press, Boston, Mass., 1948, 88 pages)

Reviewed by:

W. WALLACE BUSH
(Minister, Wollaston Unitarian Society, Wollaston, Mass.)

Weak on Education!
Weak on Religion!

Mr. Johnson's close working relation to our Department of Religious Education makes his little book, if not an official, at least a semi-official pronouncement on religious education. It is therefore important for all Unitarians to read this book.

Before he entered the ministry during the war years, Mr. Johnson was a teacher and headmaster in Minneapolis. His knowledge of the history of education and modern educational methods enables him to provide the reader with interesting material which should be helpful to any church school teacher. It should be noted, however, that Mr. Johnson's attempt to avoid indoctrination is a conservative position still accepted by many educators even today. This position is one that seeks to impart attitudes rather than theological beliefs in the religious education of children. The Report of the Commission of Appraisal for 1936 warns us to guard against making such a pretense. It reads: "The educational world, however, has recently experienced a sharp reaction as a result of the charge from radical quarters that one who pretends to avoid indoctrination is simply indoctrinating in a more subtle form." (p. 187)

In passing from the field of education to that of the ministry the author has naturally brought much of his experience with him but he seems to be unmindful that the church is different from the school, and religious nurture different from factual instruction. He writes: "If it were not for the clash between denominations and creeds, religion would be part of the secular program. It is a part, now, in spite of our necessary separation of church and state, because of the objectives they have in common." Here we find evidence of a completely secularized conception of religious education. This is truly a bold step and confronts us with a form of religious nationalism advocated by Thomas Jefferson in the early 19th century.

The spirit of the nineteenth century comes out of this little book in other ways too. The author's references to a religion of "two worlds" puts him in a weak position to evaluate present day theology: no Protestant theologian of any note today accepts this "two world" religion. Also the author's approach to biblical religion is in the spirit of 19th century moralism. Consequently, much of the religious significance of the Prophetic-Hebraic-Christian tradition is lost and the importance of biblical knowledge, as an aid to the understanding of Western Culture, is missing.

Secular education is a poor substitute for religious education; morals lose their power without a religious dynamic to sustain them; humor can never replace a profound religious faith which overcomes the incongruities of life on the deeper level of existence; "attitudes" can never match the power of a belief in God as the Lord of History. Secular idealism as a substitute for religious education is on the wane. It is time that our Department of Religious Education caught up with history by providing Unitarian church schools with a religious education program in keeping with the times.

What Other Religious Education Authorities Think of Our Beacon Course

"Frankly, they seemed more adapted for public school or home use than as a course in religious education."

(A writer of textbooks for children)

"In trying to use 'Martin and Judy' I find the stories long. It is more of a reading book than a study book. . . . In teaching children of kindergarten and early primary age I would supplement this material with some Bible stories and great stories of the world. It would seem to me there would have to be supplementary material for all of these books. Children need to know about the church, the celebration of its great days . . . also . . . the teachings and story of Jesus. 'Consider the Children' is excellent on method, and we list it for extra reading in many leadership courses. Very probably I hold a different point of view regarding the use of the Bible with children. It is an adult book, but parts can be used, and used so that there will not be any necessity of unlearning. I would not withhold introducing Jesus until as late as is suggested in your Unitarian courses. Nor would I withhold all historical stories until the time-sense is developed."

(An editor of children's religious books)

"I cannot help looking upon them (the Beacon Course books) as supplementary reading so far as a religious education curriculum is concerned. To say that they 'skirt the field of religion' would describe my feeling about them exactly.

"Just this afternoon I was told, by a Presbyterian, that a family that had been 'shopping around' for churches was going to send their children to our school (Congregational) this fall. As our Presbyterian friend put it, 'The six year old went twelve Sundays to the Unitarian Church School and did not hear Jesus mentioned once.' Of course we laughed about it, but perhaps that experience has some significance as to what parents want for their children. This past year we had a very intelligent fifth grade girl who spent the year with us as a visitor, 'because my mother wants me to learn about the Bible. We were just studying about Egypt in our Unitarian school.' She added that she had learned all about Egypt in public school. We try to give our children something that they will not learn in public school."

(An author of one of the Closely Graded courses)

"On the whole, it seems to me that books in this field ought to acknowledge the existence of God, and devote themselves to a modern interpretation of that word."

(A Harvard professor)

"I have a great deal of respect for the persons who have developed the Beacon Press material, both for their intelligent approach and for the sincerity of their conviction. In my mind, however, it seems clear that we need in our courses in religious education a more positive theology. Since this is my conviction, I truly feel that in the curriculum of religious education of children there should be an abundance of material which helps them to become aware of the reality of God, of his way with men, and which will inspire them to seek to know and do the will of God. Certainly children do not learn to do the will of God merely by meditating upon

him. They learn to do it by doing it. At the same time, I am convinced that they do not learn to do the will of God without continual and specific reference in their daily lives to God himself."

(Children's editor for one of our large publishing houses)

(ALL QUOTATIONS ABOVE ARE ON FILE WITH THE EDITOR. NAMES ARE WITHHELD TO AVOID THE EMBARRASSMENT OF CONTROVERSY TO THEM).

British Unitarian Religious Education

ROBERT DALE RICHARDSON

(Minister, First Parish, Medford, Mass.)

Professional educators in both England and America today are very much interested in the content and methods of education. It is not enough, however, that the professionals be concerned: It is time for the layman to try to understand just what education is trying to accomplish in the two nations. For through mutual understanding and the sharing of our insights and ideals we may both make a contribution to world peace and harmony. The writer believes profoundly that Unitarian Christians in both Great Britain and in the United States will have an important work in this closer understanding. To that end it is highly desirable that we in this nation know what our English brethren are trying to do in religious education, and we trust that the British Churches will want to know what we are doing.

In evaluating the literature for Sunday Schools published by the Lindsay Press for the Education Society of our British Churches it is well to keep constantly in mind that since the great depression of 1929 there has been little or no stability in England, that the energies of the people were first devoted to rearmament and then to the waging of the costliest of all wars. Today little newsprint is allotted to the religious press, and the work of the religious educator is perforce limited to making things last, and doing well with few materials. With a paucity of materials, our British Unitarians have stuck to fundamentals in a way that puts to shame many of our own costly ventures in non-essentials. With this warning in mind let us look at what materials the English Churches of Unitarian dispensation have at their disposal.

There are two excellent series of Sunday school pamphlets for the Junior and Intermediate departments, dealing roughly with children from 8 to 14. The books for Juniors deal with the making of heroes both religious, moral and secular, and does so in a stimulating manner. The foundation is Biblical, as it should be, and on that excellent foundation a good superstructure of moral and secular values is erected. The Intermediates, just below the period of adoescence, are given a thorough grounding in the development of the great moral and spiritual values. They do this through man's curiosity in knowing all about his environment, leading up to his high adventure in moral values. The books are thoroughly practical and knit together the life of the spirit, the life of moral adventure and the everyday world of the craftsman and laborer. More power to them in such fine syntheses!

Two other children's books must be singled out for commendation: "Lessons for Little Ones" by Evelyne Scott; and "Half Hours with the Parables" by J. C. Hirst.

A group of English clergymen and scholars under the leadership of Dr. Holt, Principal MacLachlan, and others, has produced and is now publishing a series of excellent pamphlets for adults. The most recent series entitled "Religion in a Changing World" is popular without being sketchy. Some sample titles in this series are: "Changing Moral Standards," "Religion and the Scientists," "The Daring Church" and "C. S. Lewis and some Modern Theologians." Another series even more forthright and arresting is called "Uncensored Avowals" and includes From Primitive to Modern Religion; World Vision; Is There a Religious Basis for Society; and God, Commonwealth and the Afterlife.

In my estimation the finest literary as well as acute theological thinking is to be found in a series begun around 1940, when the cause of western civilization was the concern of all of us, entitled "Religion: Its Modern Need and Problems." Here no problem in religion is dodged, from Mysticism to Humanism. A few arresting titles are: Progress and Christianity; Religious Experience; Psychical Research; The Bible Today; The Friendly Church; Modern Religious Fundamentals; Steps to the Religious Life; Religion and its Social Expression; The Meaning and Value of Religion; Prayer, its Meaning and Justification by Lawrence Clare; The Problem of Evil; The Challenge of Humanism; Christianity and Sex Morality; The Present Religious Situation.

There is a little folder called "Our Religious Faith" which I wish to commend especially and also recommend to our Unitarian Christian congregations. Excellent for the newcomer into our household of faith. Also a series of illuminated cards called "I Believe" with cards suitable for children in the primary grades and also for adults. Our Beacon Press Book store should stock these if importation is possible.

Today in Great Britain although they are hard pressed by stern economic reality there is a growing desire to educate all the people, to train them all in the priceless values of our western culture and in what Higginson has called the "Symphony of Religions." There is a growing emphasis on nursery schools and insights into the mind of the growing child. Visual education is rapidly assuming a real and honored place in the school curriculum. Our religious educators both in America and in England can learn much, I think, from these newer techniques in secular education. Our British Churches have rightly insisted on the time honored content of Bible and Church history as the core of religious education, and ethical insights and social studies based thereon as the application. My ardent hope is that through exchange of thought and practice our American and British Churches may be greatly strengthened for the tremendously important work which is at hand, the religious education of Unitarian boys and girls.

God Answers Prayer

DUNCAN HOWLETT

"Prayer has been called the soul's sincere desire, and so it is indeed. The most sincere desire of all of us, and hence the profoundest prayer we can utter, is that we may each do the small part in the life we are given to live, and that we do it as best we may.

God has never failed to answer such prayers. Our minds are not yet equal to knowing how a good God and a terrible war are possible in the same universe. But our hearts, where God dwells, have long since told us that we can repair to Him for courage and strength, for the understanding of what is good and true, and for the will to rededicate ourselves to noble living.

And in regard to prayers for peace, let ours be only that we may each do our part in this great struggle however small that part may be; that we may have the fortitude to see it through; that we may keep within us a spot forever sacred to the things we hold dear; and that we may have the vision and the will to help bring about a world from which war shall one day go forever."

"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (from October to June) by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass. Mr. Theodore Browne, Chairman; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

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Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to the Treasurer, Mr. Joseph E. Coulter, 101 Tremont St., Boston 8, Mass.

Contributions toward the expenses of "Our Faith" are gladly welcomed from all friends.

Extra copies of "Our Faith" in quantity may be secured, for distribution in local parishes, and for literature tables, from the editor, or from King's Chapel House, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.